

the public approbation, and that reward which the devoted servant of a liberal art most values and prizes.

Not to dwell longer, therefore, we sum up our purpose in two words: we want a professional associate as well as a publishing agent. Honour and profit are to be reaped by the right pursuants. We bind ourselves to the best exercise of our humble judgment in deciding on the claims with which we may be intrusted. We are but the stewards of our class.

#### MR. WILSON'S REPORT ON FRESCO PAINTING.

The following are extracts from Mr. Wilson's report to the Commissioners on the Fine Arts, contained in the appendix to the Commissioners' second report, just delivered.

Mr. C. H. Wilson, Director of the Government School of Design at Somerset House, was in the course of last year employed by her Majesty's Commissioners on the Fine Arts to proceed to the Continent to collect information relating to the objects of the Commission. Having been furnished with the necessary instructions, he left England in August, and returned in January last.

The report printed in the appendix is the result. Having described "the state of middle-age frescos and other mural pictures," the "construction of the walls on which such paintings are executed," &c., Mr. Wilson makes the following representation regarding the

#### DURATION OF FRESCOS.

"The circumstances which must be taken into consideration in judging of the duration of frescos have already been adverted to. It has been shown that where proper constructive principles have been attended to, and where the walls are of good and appropriate materials, the safety of the paintings is in a great measure secured, and it may be certainly proved that fresco is a very durable mode of painting, not surpassed in this respect by any other, if, indeed, equalled.

"But, independently of the most careful building, various causes may contribute to the deterioration or destruction of frescos, and, as these have been very distinctly described in the first report, it is not necessary to say much on the subject further than to state a few facts.

"Damp is the greatest enemy of this kind of painting; it ascends through the walls from the soil, and descends from ill-constructed or dilapidated roofs. In Venice, where the houses actually stand in the water, the external plastering falls off entirely to a height of 20 feet; in Milan, Padua, and elsewhere, I observed that paintings are obliterated on walls to a height of from 2 to 8 feet from the ground. The destruction of many fine works on roofs and on the upper part of walls is entirely to be attributed to culpable negligence or ignorance; this is painfully exemplified in the Duomo at Parma; the old insufficient roof over the dome still exists under the new leaded one, which has been added to save the wrecks of Correggio's works from final destruction. Many examples might be adduced of injury resulting to frescos from imperfect roofing and, the fact having been recognised, precautions have now been taken after irreparable injury has been done. The tiled roofs of Italy have everywhere been a constant source of injury to frescos, but in some few instances precautions of an extraordinary nature have been taken to make the roof water-tight. At the Villa Masser flat tiles have been laid at right angles to the roof-timbers, the joints being filled with lime. These tiles represent the plank used in this country, and the ordinary roof tiles are put over them in the usual way; this makes an impenetrable but very heavy roof. The plan has lately been adopted in the Palazzo del Giardino at Parma; the frescos there by Annibale Carracci having suffered from damp. The Carracci have evidently been alive to the necessity of taking precautions against damp; the result in the Parmese Palace in Rome, which is under an open loggia, is covered with lead at the Palazzo del Giardino the upper surface of the vault has been carefully plastered; but this has not sufficed.

"Some frescos by Allori, in the Palazzo Vecchio, at Florence, which are on a stucco brick wall, have lately been destroyed by plastering the back of the wall. In the library at Siena the paintings on the vaults were ruined by some masons who mixed lime above them. All these facts prove the necessity of preventing by every possible means the access of moisture to the paintings, and the difficulty of whatever in effecting this.

"External frescos may never be executed in this country, but their preservation in some parts of Italy may encourage their adoption in corridors and porticos. Paintings are found to be well preserved on external walls turned to a favourable weather quarter. Thus, as at Genoa and Treviso, although frescos are nearly obliterated by the action of the weather on stone walls, it is to be observed that wherever they are protected by the projection of a roof or cornice, they are well preserved. External damp or sea air has no bad effect. The obliteration of external frescos in Venice cannot be attributed to this, since those at Genoa are preserved; and those in the Campo Santo, at Pisa, are doubtless destroyed by damp from the soil and roof. As has already been observed, that by Oragna, in the same place, has not suffered at all from the action of the atmosphere.

"The paintings in the upper loggia of the Vatican have suffered severely, owing to the inefficient construction of the roof. These beneath, from Raphael's designs, have been much obliterated, partly by damp (the corridor above having been left open all lately), and partly from their having been painted on an intonaco of lime and marbled dust; they have also suffered in some measure from violence and mischief. To this last cause, unfortunately, the destruction of many valuable works is to be attributed, as a number of the buildings which should have been consecrated by the works of genius have occasionally served as quarters for the code soldiers of ruder times, or even for the galley slave.

"Many fine works have been irretrievably injured by the populace; yet those in churches have suffered in this way, and those in clusters have also been much injured by wanton mischief. It is a mistake to suppose that the natives of Italy are exempt from this disposition, which is sufficiently proved by the injury inflicted on many precious monuments of art in that country.

"Smoke has frequently been mentioned as a dangerous agent of destruction, but its effects can be removed. Thus, in the Palace at Modena there is a large hall the ceiling of which is painted by Fra Angelico. The woodwork in the lower part of the hall was entirely burnt some years ago, and the frescoed ceiling was completely blackened by the smoke, but was afterwards cleaned with complete success.

"The frescos by Guercino, at Piacenza, have been injured in a peculiar manner; birds getting into the dome have flown against and scratched them.

"It may be proper to mention the frescos of the Bolognese school in the Louvre at Paris, the climate of which resembles that of this country; with the exception of one, destroyed by the infiltration of water carelessly thrown on the floor above, those paintings are in a very good state."

Then follow descriptions of paintings in fresco by different masters.

The following interesting details on the "effect of coloured glass on paintings," and on "fresco-secco," conclude the report:—

#### EFFECT OF STAINED GLASS ON PAINTINGS.

"A few facts and observations connected with the employment of stained glass in rooms with paintings in them may not be unimportant, as an opinion has been expressed that windows coloured in any degree are incompatible with paintings in rooms so lighted. It rather appears, however, from many instances, that stained glass may be sometimes so employed with great advantage; and that the excess of light may be thus subdued, or otherwise modified, so as to produce the most pleasing effect.

"In the cathedral at Munich the windows are coloured to a certain height, and although the effect is far from pleasing, considered in itself, yet it is very useful as regards the pictures in the church, as the light is brought in from above in an advantageous manner.

"At Saronno, near Milan, there are two small frescos by Lami with a coloured circular window between. The pictures are lighted by a window on one side, and could not be seen at all but for the exclusion of white light by the coloured glass in the centre window. In S. Petronio, at Bologna, there is an altar-piece under a window filled with richly stained glass; the picture is well lighted from an opposite window; but if the window over it had been of white glass, it would have been impossible to see the picture, which is very dark. The sun happened to shine through the rich hues of the window above, and I observed here, as I had previously remarked at Saronno, that the picture did not suffer in consequence.

"At Amis, in the upper church, all the windows, excepted over the door, are coloured, but in those which are painted, much of the glass is left white; the light is weak in this church, and it is thus apparent that it does not always answer to 'let all the windows be stained'—although pure light is wanted at times, but stained glass is not the only way of getting light into a room with paintings may have a

certain proportion of stained glass in it, provided pure light be not altogether excluded. It may be objected that coloured rays will be thrown on the frescos when the sun shines, but white rays are quite as objectionable, and besides, frescos never should be placed where the sun can shine upon them, as, like other pictures, they fade sooner or later under its influence; coloured glass in such a case might be an advantage, and the inconvenience from the coloured rays would be temporary."

#### FRESCO-SECCO.

"Certain processes of painting allied to fresco having been referred to in the foregoing statement, it may be desirable to add a brief account of them.

"The early mural pictures, although commenced in fresco, were, as before observed, usually finished in distemper, and the vehicle employed was a mixture of yolk of egg and rusegar. This mode of painting was adopted also on panel and on canvas; and it is probable that many Venetian pictures, supposed to be entirely in oil, were painted in this manner, and then glazed and finished with oil colour.

"There can be no doubt of the durability of this mode of painting on walls, as there are many well-preserved examples of it by the early masters; but I am unable to quote any instance of the successful adoption of the process in modern times. Professor Overbeck informed me that he painted in this manner at Assisi, but that it was necessary to lay a ground of whitening on the wall in the first place—a process which is manifestly objectionable and not to accordance with ancient practice.

"An Italian artist informed me that it is necessary first to give the wall a coat of strong ash, and then to give it a second coat mixed with the yolk of egg and vinegar.

"Another mode of painting, of which there appear to be a few early examples, and of which there are many later ones, is called by the Italians *fresco-secco*. I was informed that a large painting by Oragna, in the church of Santa Maria Novella, is in *fresco-secco*. I examined it, but hesitate to pronounce an opinion.

"The later masters painted extensive works in this manner; the ceiling of the great hall in the Barberini Palace, in Rome, appears to me to be in *fresco-secco*; and in Rome, Florence, and Genoa, the ceilings of most of the palaces are covered with paintings executed in this manner; it is the mode of painting still adopted in Italy for nearly all decorative purposes, in case of execution, and unquestionably desirable, whilst it is certainly the most economical process which can be followed.

"Fresco-secco has been practised for some time in Munich; the ceilings of corridors and loggias, and those of staircases, are thus painted in the palace; and the Chevalier von Klenze, who first introduced the process at Munich, is satisfied with the experiments which have been there made with it.

"The following is a description of the method. The plastering of the wall having been completed, and lime and sand only having been used for the last coat, the whole is allowed to dry thoroughly. When a wall is intended to be painted, the surface of the lime is rubbed with pumice-stone, and on the evening of the day preceding that on which the painting is to be commenced the plaster is thoroughly washed with water, with which a little lime has been mixed. The wall is again wetted next morning, and then the cartoons are fastened up and the outline is pounced. The artist then begins to paint. The colours are the same as those used in *fresco-buono*, and are mixed with water in the same way, lime being used for the white.

"If the wall should become too dry, a syringe, having many fine holes at the end, is used to wet it. Work done in this way will bear to be washed as well as real fresco, and is as durable; for ornament it is a better method than real fresco, as in the latter art it is quite impossible to make the joinings at outlines, owing to the complicated forms of ornaments; on this account walls thus decorated in real fresco present an unsatisfactory appearance. The joinings are particularly observable in the loggia of the Vatican.

"Painting in *fresco-secco* can be executed and resumed at any point. The artist need not rigidly calculate his day's work, and can always keep the plaster in a good state for working on. But whilst it offers these advantages, and is particularly useful where mere ornamental painting is alone contemplated, it is in every important respect an inferior art to real fresco. Paintings executed in this mode are ever heavy and opaque, whereas fresco is light and transparent. *Fresco-secco* has been chiefly adopted by late and inferior masters, and none of the works executed in this manner are of great reputation. The early pictures, which are denoted by the Italians as works in *fresco-secco*, are not probably executed in this manner. The method may have been adopted in repainting parts and in cases where the original fresco was so injured as to require to be repainted, but it is not the method of the original fresco, and the latter is the only method of painting in fresco which is worthy of the name."